

U.S. Seizes Haiti-Bound Invaders

*Manferrer, Rolando
Vilaboa, Napoleon
C.B.S.*

Band Arrested Before Leaving Florida Keys

Cuban Ex-Senator Masferrer Claims One Boat Escaped

KEY WEST, Fla. (AP) — A band of heavily armed Latin exiles and American adventurers was arrested in the Florida Keys last night, apparently squelching a vest-pocket invasion of Haiti.

However, one of the invasion organizers said today that a boatload of commandos got away.

Rolando Masferrer, a former Cuban Senator who hoped the invasion might eventually lead to the overthrow of Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro, said 50 men were aboard the ship.

"It's in international waters," said Masferrer, who had tried and failed to launch a Haitian invasion in November. "Nothing can be done about it."

Masferrer, arrested along with dozens of other uniformed commandos at a beachfront home in the middle of the Florida Keys, said the ship was to have rendezvoused with two other boatloads of invaders on a Haitian shore this week.

Hoped to Oust Duvalier

Joining forces with rebels inside Haiti, the commandos expected to oust Haitian dictator Francois Duvalier within a week, Masferrer said. Father Jean Baptiste Georges, former education minister under Duvalier, was to be made president, he said.

Thirty days later, Masferrer said, he would have an army strong enough to invade Cuba, striking across the narrow Windward Passage that separates Haiti and Cuba.

But U.S. customs agents surrounded the beachfront home — at Cocoa Plum Beach on a remote section of Key Vaca north of Marathon last night and broke up the plans.

Twenty-one Cuban and Haitian exiles — from Miami and New York — were arrested and taken to Key West. Father Georges was among them.

Taken to Miami

Customs agents said 79 were arrested and taken to Miami in two chartered buses. The jail in Miami said it booked only 52.

The war party — dressed in a motley collection of U.S. Army fatigues, camouflage uniforms and hunting gear — had been in the Keys five days getting ready for the invasion. A truck loaded with 1,000 pounds of dynamite was found on the highway Sunday, and two members of the group were arrested.

Masferrer said the army was to embark in three ships. He indicated the first ship slipped away from shore possibly only hours before the raid.

Fifteen men were about to board a 55-foot shrimp boat when the agents broke in. The remainder of the group was to take off later, he said, although he did not indicate when.

There was much shouting in Spanish when the war party was forced to leave the concrete-block house of some eight to ten rooms.

The men finally lined up in a military formation and started marching down the narrow paved road in the darkness toward Marathon, apparently a protest against their arrest.

The outnumbered customs agents — who apparently did not expect such a large group — called for reinforcements. More

than 20 sheriff's deputies from up and down the long chain of keys rushed to the house.

As the cars began to arrive, the exiles stopped marching. No shots were fired.

"They were pretty peaceful when I got there," said one deputy. "They were standing in little groups beside the road waiting for the charter buses. A few of them would get excited every once in a while but we didn't have any trouble."

Masferrer said he had organized an army of 350 men. He hinted the others might be waiting for the invasion to start, but he gave no specifics when questioned.

Arsenal in House

Inside the house, agents found an arsenal. Masferrer said it included 100 M1 rifles, 50 carbines, 10 automatic rifles, 15 .30-caliber machine guns, ten .50-caliber machine guns, six 60-millimeter mortars, one 81-millimeter mortars and 50 Belgian rifles.

Masferrer was taken to Key West, where he and the other commandos milled around until dawn while customs agents processed them. Some wore olive green battle fatigues; some wore civilian clothes; some wore mixtures of both.

One Haitian youth carried a six-inch bust of Jose Marti, the Cuban independence hero.

A Haitian exile from New York hoisted a banner as he was hauled into the Miami jail. "In union there is strength," said the large blue and white Haitian revolutionary flag.

"We had been working on this for seven years and now this," he said.

Masferrer, wearing a camouflage cap, green fatigue pants, a brown short-sleeve shirt and brown hunting boots, was bitter about the United States' stopping the invasion.

"The United States is protecting the invasion."